



Community Infection Prevention and Control Policy for General Practice

(also suitable for adoption by other healthcare providers, e.g.
Dental Practice, Podiatry)

Respiratory and cough hygiene

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RESPIRATORY AND COUGH HYGIENE

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This document has been adopted as a Policy by:

Organisation:

Signed:

Job Title:

Date Adopted:

Review Date:

If your organisation would like to exclude or include any additional points to this Policy, please include below. Please note, the Community IPC Team cannot endorse or be held responsible for any addendums.

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RESPIRATORY AND COUGH HYGIENE

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1. Introduction

This Policy is one of the 'Standard infection control precautions' (SICPs) referred to by NHS England and NHS Improvement.

Respiratory and cough hygiene can help reduce the risk of spreading respiratory infections, protecting those in contact with the infected person, e.g. patients and staff.

Staff should adopt good respiratory and cough hygiene practices themselves and promote them to patients.

Always use standard infection control precautions and, where required, transmission based precautions (SICPs and TBPs), refer to the 'SICPs and TBPs Policy for General Practice'.

When caring for patients in relation to COVID-19 or any other new emerging infections, staff should refer to national infection prevention and control guidance.

GP Practices should ensure regular audits to monitor compliance with the Policy are undertaken and to provide assurance.

2. What are respiratory tract infections?

Respiratory tract infections (RTIs) are mainly caused by viruses and can affect the upper respiratory tract or the lower respiratory tract.

Upper respiratory tract infections (URTIs), e.g. sore throat, Rhinovirus (common cold), sinusitis, involve the throat, nose or sinuses.

Lower respiratory tract infections (LRTIs), e.g. pneumonia, bronchitis, tuberculosis, involve the large airways in the lungs.

RTIs caused by a virus, e.g. the common cold, usually get better without any treatment.

RTIs caused by bacteria, e.g. pneumonia, tuberculosis, usually require antibiotic treatment and in some cases, admission to hospital.

Symptoms of an RTI include:

- A sore throat
- Sneezing
- A cough - which may bring up mucus
- A stuffy or runny nose
- Headaches
- Muscle aches
- Tight chest, wheezing or breathlessness
- Fever
- General unwell feeling

3. How are respiratory secretion infections spread?

When a person with a respiratory infection coughs or sneezes, millions of viral or bacterial particles are released from the mouth or nose in respiratory droplets. These droplets travel in the air, contaminating people and surfaces in their path.

Infection is then spread either:

- Person-to-person, e.g. the droplets land directly on the mucous membranes of a person's eyes, nose or mouth, and the infection then enters their body
- Indirectly, e.g. the droplets land on surfaces such as care equipment, desk or person. Hands that then come into contact with that surface become contaminated. If the hands are not cleaned and the person touches their eyes, nose or mouth, they can become infected

Bacteria and viruses can survive in the environment from hours to months, e.g. influenza virus up to 24 hours, COVID-19 up to 72 hours.

For advice on influenza management, please contact your local Community Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) or Health Protection (HP) Team.

Other illnesses caused by viruses, e.g. chicken pox, measles, can also be spread by inhaling droplets of the respiratory secretions from an infected person's cough or sneeze, or from touching surfaces contaminated when they coughed or sneezed.

Those most at risk of developing complications of infections spread by respiratory secretions include:

- Children under 5 years of age

- Adults aged 65 years and over
- People age 6 months to 65 years and over who have chronic diseases or lowered immunity levels
- Pregnant women

4. Good respiratory and cough hygiene

To reduce the risk of spreading infections when coughing, sneezing, wiping or blowing the nose, staff and patients should:

- Have access to and use disposable tissues (not cloth handkerchiefs)
- Cover the nose and mouth with a disposable tissue when sneezing, coughing, wiping and blowing the nose
- Dispose of used tissues into a waste bin or bag immediately after use
- Clean hands with either:
 - Liquid soap and warm running water; or
 - Skin wipes or alcohol handrub

For further details, refer to the 'Hand hygiene Policy for General Practice'.

Staff may need to help patients to ensure that:

- Disposable tissues are available
- There is a waste bin within easy reach for them to dispose of used tissues
- They are able to or are assisted to clean their hands

Do not:

- Use cloth handkerchiefs
- Touch the eyes, nose and mouth until hands have been cleaned after contact with respiratory secretions or items contaminated with them, e.g. tissues, surfaces
- Use skin wipes if suitable handwashing facilities are available
- Contaminate surfaces and pockets of uniform or clothing with used tissues

If no disposable tissue is available, cough or sneeze into your elbow or upper arm, not your hand and not into the air. Although this won't stop all the respiratory secretions spreading, it can reduce the distance they travel.

A 'Respiratory and cough hygiene Poster' is available to download at www.infectionpreventioncontrol.co.uk.





Respiratory and cough hygiene	
	• Cough or sneeze into a clean tissue, not into your hands.
	• Dispose of the tissue immediately into the nearest waste bin.
	• If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve.
	• Always clean your hands after coughing or sneezing, either using soap and warm running water, alcohol handrub or hand wipes.
These steps will help prevent the spread of colds, flu and other respiratory infections	

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5. Infection Prevention and Control resources, education and training

The Community Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) Team have produced a wide range of innovative educational and IPC resources designed to assist your Practice in achieving compliance with *The Health and Social Care Act 2008: Code of Practice on the prevention and control of infections and related guidance* and CQC registration requirements.

These resources are either free to download from the website or available at a minimal cost covering administration and printing:

- 25 IPC Policy documents for General Practice
- 'Preventing Infection Workbook: Guidance for General Practice'
- 'IPC CQC inspection preparation Pack for General Practice'
- IPC audit tools, posters, leaflets and factsheets
- 'IPC Bulletin for General Practice Staff'

In addition, we hold educational study events in North Yorkshire and York and can arrange bespoke training packages. Prices vary depending on your requirements and location.

Further information on these high quality evidence-based resources is available at www.infectionpreventioncontrol.co.uk.

6. References

Department of Health (2015) *The Health and Social Care Act 2008: Code of Practice on the prevention and control of infections and related guidance*

<https://fitfortraveltest.scot.nhs.uk/advice/disease-prevention-advice/respiratory-hygiene-and-infections#Respiratory> [Accessed May 2021]

NHS England and NHS Improvement (March 2019) *Standard infection control precautions: national hand hygiene and personal protective equipment policy*

www.nhs.uk/conditions/Respiratory-tract-infection/ [Accessed May 2021]